The Rice University Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) club has been entering their (ex-Performatek) Milano in the One Lap of America race since 2005, and this is their record of the event in 2007. The thing that amazes me most about this whole endeavor is that it is a bona fide class in the Rice engineering curriculum, given for actual credit toward graduation! One Lap 101!

The club actually fields two cars—the Milano and an Isuzu Impulse Turbo—but what do we care about Isuzus?

As you may remember, the One Lap is a nut job “race” originally sponsored by Car & Driver magazine. It devolved (?) from the original “Cannon Ball Baker Sea-to-Shining-Sea Memorial Trophy Dash” cross-country race from NYC to California. Eventually, it became what is, in effect, a long rally with untimed transits over regular roads and then time trials on various race tracks scattered all over the country. The original One Lap actually was that (a trip around the continental USA), but it is now relegated to one section of the country that changes from year to year. Typically, the circuit takes about 5000 miles and ten or more days to complete, and the teams compete on ten or more tracks of all sorts.

Since The Tire Rack is the primary sponsor, these events start at Tire Rack headquarters in South Bend, IN, and travel out to a new track every day (sometimes 800-1000 miles away) as they make their way back to South Bend for the final events. This year’s One Lap went west out to Colorado, Utah, etc.

More than anything, it is an exercise in organization, preparation, and endurance, mixed with a massive dose of sleep deprivation. As mentioned in last year’s report, the character of the event has changed substantially. Originally, it was just an excuse for some car crazies to get out of the house and have fun. Since there are no rules on car prep or specs, it has become more and more a venue for “Tuner Wars”. There are even a few quasi-factory teams. The high-end teams have tech support and semipro drivers (and, of course, really deep pockets), and most of the big boys are running serious turbo- or supercharged power. Forced induction was even more important this year, with several tracks at very high elevations.

The One Lap Milano runs in the “Mid-Priced Sedan” class, which sounds benign enough until you find out that half of the class is made up of heavily-modified Subaru WRX STI, Mitsubishi EVO, Dodge Neon SR/T etc. 400-500 hp are needed to be a serious contender. By contrast, the Rice Racing Owls go to battle with an 18-year-old Alfa sedan, the enthusiasm and natural endurance of youth, and sponsorship from Performatek, Garcia Alfa Racing, their dads, and whoever
else they can talk into donating time, parts, and services. In spite of the seemingly insurmountable odds, they compete with a smile, a can-do attitude, and a love for every miserable minute of the event.

The Rice team has done better each year, and 2007 yielded the best results ever. They were, in fact, the highest-placed naturally-aspirated car in their class, and finished 54th overall out of 85 entered. The car in their class, and finished 54th overall out of 85 entered. The car was set up with a tired 3.0L S engine (which burned so much oil that the team’s unofficial name was the Blue Smoke Alfa Team), and a suspension slightly modified with the Performance heavy-duty street suspension (27mm torsion bars, matching rear springs, Koni shocks, and big sway bars front and rear). In their search for speed via weight loss (and against the advice of all sane people), they modified the car in ways guaranteed to make the car excruciatingly uncomfortable for the over-the-road sessions. All insulation, carpets, headliners, door panels … gone. Dash … gone. Heater and AC … gone. Window winders … gone (the driver side window is now strap-activated). Rear seats … gone.

This year’s Racing Owls (Team Alfa) were Damen Hattori (club President, Junior) - main driver; David Carr (Senior); and Nikolay Kostov (a Freshman who’s from Bulgaria). Damen has driven the last two years and continued this year as well. Here’s how it all went:

**Day 1** This year’s One Lap started like they all seem to do for the Rice Racing Owls (after finals and all-nighters): With an engine swap the night before they were supposed to leave for South Bend. Their 3.0L blew its head gasket again, and it was lucky for them that Andrew Garcia had a spare to lend them. Another late-night (to 4 am) engine swap.

**Day 2** Departure day – some other little last-minute details: A trip to the alignment shop and they were off, only six hours behind schedule. The Alfa was rock steady throughout the trip, and they arrived in South Bend in good order.

**Day 3** Much to their dismay, they found that the performance ante had been upped again from last year’s levels. In their Mid-Priced Sedan class, they would be competing against highly-tuned Subaru Impreza STi’s and Dodge Neon SR/T4’s. Those cars had several times the Milano’s horsepower, but not that much more weight. There was also a nicely-tuned BMW 330i (since when is $50K a mid-priced sedan?), a couple of stock “Police” Crown Vics, and a Dodge Charger. The registration/kickoff dinner and drinks provided by race sponsor Jaegermeister put everyone in a festive mood, and then they headed to bed for what would be their last full night’s sleep for the next ten days.

**Day 4** This day was to be a full and long one: Wet skidpad at Tire Rack; a quarter-mile oval in South Bend; a drive to Joliet, Illinois, to race on the Autobahn Country Club track; and finally a drive to the hotel in Pacific Junction, Iowa.

On the wet skidpad, the Alfa did quite well, with a .709g lateral acceleration, which was good enough for 57th overall (out of 85) and exactly the same as the BMW 330i (but he was placed 58th, as Alfa is before BMW alphabetically—and in all other regards). However, this cost him a lot of time from the three timed quarter-mile laps, and the Milano finished in 71st place.

The team left for Illinois immediately, arriving in Joliet a bit early, and they were surprised to learn that the Chicago Alfa Romeo Owners Club was having its track day at the Autobahn Country Club’s other track. Many club members came over to see the car and gave the team advice and encouragement. On the track, Damen did a fine job and finished in 59th place. The BMW 330i was still in front of them, but the Milano was closing in.

The all-night drive from Joliet to Iowa, partly in pouring rain, got them to their hotel at 5 am.

**Day 5** The next morning, at the track at 8 am in pouring rain, the organizers decided to run only the morning heat and canceled the afternoon’s. Because the track was wet, the team

(Continued overleaf...
Day 6 The next day, the team was at Miller Motorsports Park at 9 am. They readjusted the rear sway bar, added oil, lowered the tire pressure a bit, and checked the car over for graduation (this guy has to get his priorities right), so the team was down a casual chat with a local gendarme, who clocked him going 108 in a 65 mph zone. As Nick said: “Using my Eastern European charm, I got away with a warning, but sure enough there was no speeding afterwards.” To make matters worse, the GPS gave them wrong directions to the hotel, and then Damen got stopped for turning against a red light; his West Coast charm got him a warning as well. They made the hotel at 4:30 am, and it was another short night.

Day 7 Pueblo Motorsport Park. Driving to the track, Dave managed to shift into reverse without fully depressing the clutch. Severe grinding noises ensued, and the transmission was never the same again! Shifting into reverse gave clunking noises, and later the box developed a loud whine from the diff. This made the team go into gentle-shifting mode, which really hampered on-track performance.

Nonetheless, in spite of that and the altitude, Pueblo proved to be an excellent track for the Alfa. The team finished the morning session in 43rd place, beating some serious cars like the supercharged Lotus Exige S and a supercharged BMW M Roadster. The 330i was just a spot ahead of them. In the afternoon session, the Milano finished 46th, but the BMW had trouble and ended up in 66th place (cryin’ time in Munich).

From Pueblo, it was on to Jennings, Oklahoma. Problems with the fuel pump circuit meant roadside repairs, and now the GPS showed a hotel ETA of 4 am. During an attempt to gain some time back, Nick had occasion for a casual chat with a local gendarme, who warned him going 108 in a 65 mph zone. As Nick said: “Using my Eastern European charm, I got away with a warning, but sure enough there was no speeding afterwards.” To make matters worse, the GPS gave them wrong directions to the hotel, and then Damen got stopped for turning against a red light; his West Coast charm got him a warning as well. They made the hotel at 4:30 am, and it was another short night.

Day 8 9 am found them at Hallet—with a camera crew from Country Music Television following them around! Here, they met up with Professor Andrew Barron—their advisor (and organizer of One Lap 101), and also an excellent race driver who happens to know Hallet really well. Hallet is a handling track, not a horsepower track, and he spent a lot of time with Damen going over the correct way to drive there. This paid off with a 49th overall in the morning session and 45th in the afternoon.

During the afternoon session, the Dodge Charger in their class was running in front of the Alfa, but Damen was steadily gaining on him. It looked like he would lap the Dodge within their three laps. Apparently, the prospect of being overtaken by an 18-year-old Alfa panicked the Dodge driver and, on one of the blind corners, he totally missed his braking point and ended up in a ditch with serious body damage.

At Hallet, Team Alfa went ahead of the 330i (gnashing of teeth and rending of lederhosen in Bavaria), and was competing even-up with a lot of really good cars. The team’s spirits were very high at this point. Unfortunately, David had to fly back to Rice for graduation (this guy has to get his priorities right), so the team was down...
to just Damen and Nick. From Hallet, it was on to Indianapolis—an easy drive and no car problems—and they were at the hotel by 4 am.

**Day 9**

O’Reilly Raceway in Indianapolis is a road course with a drag strip for the main straight. Again, a horsepower track. Damen did well with a 49th in the morning and a 56th in the afternoon. It was here that the fight for 1st place overall between the Porsche 996 Turbo and the Hennessey Dodge Viper ended when the Viper blew its clutch and DNF’d the final event. Even though the Viper had won almost every event to that point, it was GAME OVER. As Nick said, “Well, on the One Lap, reliability is everything. That’s why we run an Alfa!”

**Day 10**

Mid-Ohio again is a horsepower track, with long straights that allowed cars to reach really high speeds. In spite of the nature of the track and getting there late, leaving no time to study the track, Damen still managed to finish 53rd in the morning and 56th in the afternoon. The 330i was closing back up and, with only the dry skidpad left, the Racing Owls were getting nervous.

**Day 11**

On the dry skidpad at Tire Rack, the Alfa did really well and Damen pulled a .918g for 39th place overall. Despite the 330i’s .922 and 35th spot, it didn’t make up enough points to catch the Milano. The final One Lap results were: 54th overall for the Alfa and 57th for the 330i!!! The German nation mourns.

From there, it was back to Rice, for our heroes to clear out dorms, take summer vacations, and start planning for the 2008 race.

For 2008, plans for the car include finishing the projects started last year, and maintenance. As you read above, there was some self-inflicted damage to the transaxle, and a new one is being built. The Milano has been good to them and has finished every race, but the event is brutal on the hardware and there are always repairs needed.

New projects include upgrading the suspension to Performatek full race torsion bars and springs, as well as continued development of the 3.0 engine. They have replaced their bad engine (somehow, the top of the block was warped and wouldn’t make a seal with the head) with one from Garcia Alfa Racing. The original plan called for a supercharger installation on this engine, but looks like this has been downgraded to a slight tweaking of the S-spec engine. So far, dyno work has shown 170 rear-wheel horsepower.

Their current goal is 180 rwhp, which should be doable. Or, they may stay with the supercharger—hard to tell right now. The car is already at its new home at Motor Sport Ranch (a private track club) in Houston (not sure how they swung that one). And the focus of this winter is to tune ... practice ... tune ... practice—until they are sure that the car and drivers are dialed in.

If you would like to support the team, they have a limited number of Racing Owl T-shirts available if you’d like to donate $20 or more—a ridiculously low price to support another chapter of Alfa’s glorious racing history! Or, if you have too many T-shirts, straight cash donations are welcome.

**Contact info:** You can contact the team leader, Nick Kostov, at nnk1@rice.edu. You can also check out the team’s efforts more thoroughly, pictures and all, at www.ruf.rice.edu/~rsae/. And the One Lap of America official website is www.onelapofamerica.com.

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**The AONE Club Roster**

As we did last year, we have sent the official AONE roster to you via email as a PDF file that you can store and/or print out. If you didn’t receive it, then either:

1. Your email address isn’t on AONE’s email list—send a quick message to webmaster@velocissima.com to rectify that.
2. The email we sent to you containing the roster bounced—contact webmaster@velocissima.com and we’ll try it again.
3. You don’t have an email address—send a self-addressed stamped envelope to AONE, 300 Westfield Street, Dedham, MA 02026 and we’ll send you a printed copy.

The roster is sorted three different ways (by last name, by members’ city and state, and by Alfa model year). It’s current as of January, 2008 and is provided as a service to our members to let you know who else in the club might have similar Alfa models, and who else might be living near you. If your current information is inaccurate, please contact AROC National at 877-399-2762 (toll-free) or admin@aroc-usa.org to update it. In the interest of privacy, no street address or email address information is being included, and the roster will not be published on the internet.

We think you’ll find that the AONE Club Roster will be of great benefit in keeping in touch with your fellow members. We appreciate any feedback!